Contemporary Literary Theory

Compiled and Edited

with

An Introduction

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In today's global age it has become commonplace to adopt the interdisciplinary approach in the field of creative writing; literature and literary criticism. For me, embarking on a critical reading of a work of literature is nothing if not a creative act; one that is parallel and complementary to the first creative act of producing the text itself. For this complementary second creative act to yield its creative product, the literary critic has to exploit the findings and insights, of all the disciplines adjacent to literature: sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, politics, culture, and the like. The communications revolution, together with the spread of education, has necessitated the adoption of the creative approach in the field of literary criticism. This, in its turn, has made it necessary for theoreticians in this field to come up with a diversity of critical approaches to literature.

It follows then that for a student of literature at the university level to cope with such developments and the subsequent requirements in this connection, he/she has to adopt creative thinking as a precondition for reading literature creatively. This creative approach necessitates that the student familiarize himself/herself with such various critical approaches/ theories. However, this is not an end in itself; it is but a first step, that must be followed by further equally crucial (if not more) steps.

One such complementary step is the need to turn such information into (functional) knowledge, which the reader/student brings to his reading of a literary text. Here, the best thing to do for him/her is to adopt the 'divergent thinking' approach. Instead of handling critical theoriesl approaches as diverse, fragmented, and disconnected entities, the reader establishes connections between such bits and pieces and exploit them to read the literary text

creatively. This process Mourad Wahba defines as creativity. For him, creativing is the creation of new relations between apparently disconnected things, and such new relations change reality.

However, since creativity cannot be taught, the creative approach can be specified so as the reader can sensitize himself / herself to its nature and meet its requirements accordingly.

One basic requirement of this approach in the field of literary criticism is to enable the student to have access to some remarkably influential critical essays which represent such diverse critical approaches.

Ever since the 1920s various new critical approaches have emerged in direct response to the demands of the ever changing world around us. Before this came about we used to talk about "the moral approach", "the psychological

approach", and "the sociological approach". Then "the formalistic approach emerged and spread worldwide. Related to this is the New-Critical approach.

The label "New Criticism" was actually adopted as a polemical banner by a number of American critics in the late 1930s and 1940s. Many New-Critics looked to T.S.Eliot as a guiding spirit. Also I.A. Richards and John Crowe Ransom and William Empson have had their shaping influence upon this school of criticism. Also in the United States New Critics like Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, W.K.Wimsat Jr and Monroe C. Beardsley further expounded and strengthened New Criticism. Also René Welleck contributed greatly to its solidification as a school of criticism.

Though there are considerable differences among these New Critics, they primarily stress the autonomy of art and regard it as a valid source of knowledge that cannot be

communicated in terms other than its own. A critic has to focus on nothing other than the text itself; the writer's intentions, his/her social or cultural background, his motives or moral values are all irrelevant in this regard.

Due to the numerous limitations of this approach in part many other critical approaches have emerged and gained considerable reputation. Now we refer to the Archetypal Approach, and the Phenomenological Approach. Also there are the Marxist school of criticism, Linguistic criticism, structuralism and Post-structuralist. Some such Post-structuralist approaches are: Deconstructionism, Semiotics, Hermeneutics, Feminist criticism and Reception and Reader-Response Criticism.

Such diverse critical approaches can be represented only in terms of representative individual critics. They all, despite different approaches and emphases, stress the

importance of the creative role of the reader when approaching the literary text.

The most influential figure in the realm of archetypal criticism is of course Northrop Frye. In his major work The Anatomy of Criticism, he writes: "I mean by an archetype a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience". (99). Frye seeks to establish "a grammar of literary archetypes", which can invest literary criticism with a scientific character.

The archetypal approach is also called the totemic, mythological or ritualistic approach. This is due to the archetypal critics' interest in totems, myths, and rituals. The aim in view is to prove that western literature are predicated on archetypal patterns, which extend beyond individual works to a whole body of works.

As for the phenomenological approach the reader's consciousness is the key to a creative reading of the text. Hence, such textual elements such as form, style, and genre are seen as subsidiary to the reader's consciousness. Again, such critics focus not on single works but on the oeuvre of an author.

Contrarily Marxist literary theory starts from the assumption that literature can be understood only in relation to historical and social reality. According to the Marxist standpoint, the economic base determines the nature and structure of cultural constructs (such as literature) that form the superstructure of the society. George Lukacs, for example, sees literature as reflecting socio-economic realities. He argues, that great literary works do not merely reproduce the dominant ideologies of their time but incorporate in their form a critique of these ideologies.

However, Lukac's critical realism was criticised by such Marxists as Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin, who argued that a truly revolutionary art had to break radically with conventional artistic forms. Socialist art must address itself to production rather than consumption by using radical techniques.

In contrast to both the New critics and the Marxist critics' rejection of the idea of the importance of the author's intention in reading his/her work, hermeneutics stresses its importance in interpretation. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer the historical is meaningful only in relation to the temporal situation of the interpreter. Understanding the past involves "a fusion of horizons" between the text (as the embodiment of past experiences) and the interests and even prejudices of its interpreter (who lives in the present). E.D.Hirsch argues that the interpreter has a moral duty to understand the text in relation to its original context (in the

past). In hermeneutics thinking, meaning and significance are distinguished. Whereas the meaning of a text remains constant, its significance will change in relation to the interests of its interpreters.

Since hermeneutics belongs more to the post-structuralist realm than to the structuralist area, we deam it appropriate and necessary to identify and specify what makes a literary approach structuralist or post-structuralist.

Structuralism was founded on the Saussurian principle that language as a system of signs must be considered synchronically, that is, within a single temporal plane. The diachronic aspect of language, that is, how it develops and changes over time. is seen as being of secondary importance. Saussure distinguishes between what he calls 'langue' and 'parole'. The French word for language, 'langue' is the arrangement of sounds and words which constitute a system which people share. Saussure uses 'parole' to refer to

the actual use of language by individuals in speech or writing. Saussure's distinction is sociolinguistic.

By considering literary texts as 'paroles' which must be understood in relation to 'langue' or the underlying signifying system, structuralist literary criticism inevitably concerns itself predominantly with poetics as a general science of literature. The most famous structuralist critic was Roland Barthes, but he gradually moved away from a strictly structuralist position. His later critical essays (especially 'Science versus Literature') points the way towards post-structuralism.

The most influential post-structuralist critic is the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Also the work of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the cultural theorist Michel Foucault is of crucial importance in this regard.

Derrida emphasizes the 'logocentrism' of Western thinking, that is, that meaning is conceived as existing independently of the language used to communicate it and is thus not subject to the play of language. Derrida accepts Saussure's position that meaning is the product of the differential relations between signifiers, but he goes beyond this in claiming that the temporal dimension cannot be left out of account. Derrida also reverses the traditional hierarchy (or priority) of speech over writing; he clamis that writing is a better model for understanding how language functions. In writing the signifier is always productive; writing will produce meaning in an unlimited number of potential contexts in the future. Thus, the meaning, or the generation of textual meaning, can never be determinate. Two implications of Derridean critical thinking are worth stressing here:

❶ reading and writing are no longer distinguished as two separate, unrelated processes;

❷ also the conventional distinction between 'critical' and 'creative' writing is no longer valid. Creativity exists at the two complementary stages of the act of writing/reading. A further implication here is that literature and criticism are treated equally in terms of creative production. Also it is to be stressed that we can no longer speak of the/a meaning of a text but rather of a multiplicity of meanings that are generated by different readers in different ages.

This leads us directly to two other post-siructuralist critical approaches that place the reader at the centre of the creative process of reading a literary text: Reception theory and Reader-response criticism.

In these two approaches the reader is seen as particularly crucial in the process of meaning's production. Here he/she is no longer a consumer but rather a producer of the text. A unifying figure of both schools is Wolfgang Iser, whose work is included in them both.

Iser's work argues for the centrality of the reader. He argues that all texts create 'gaps" or 'blanks' which readers must use their imagination and experiences to fill. It is in this creative interaction between text and reader that the aesthetic response or rather a creative reproduction of the work is accomplished. Also Stanley Fish argues that the meaning of a literary text cannot be seen as separate from the reader's experience of it. The text, for him, is always a construct of the reader or readers, or what he calls 'an interpretive community'. So different sets of reading strategies and norms (reading experiences) account for different communities of interpreters/ readers.

Last, but not least, we turn to feminist criticism. Initially, it reflected the socio-political goals of feminism. Of course, a major concern of this school is the image of woman in literature, her position in the circles of literary production. Some feminist critics argue that there can be no separation between the aesthetic and the moral aspects of a literary text.

Others, in contrast, argue that feminist literary criticism should address itself exclusively to the historical and social realities that go into the making of a literary text. Yet, they all agree on the need to dismantle the ideologies underlying the structures of authority intrinsic to male-dominated 'interpretive communities'.

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Georges Poulet

'The Self and Other in Critical Consciousness'

Critical consciousness relies, by definition, on thinking of 'another'; it finds its nourishment and its substance only therein..Each literary work, of no matter what kind, implies, for the writer, an act of self-discovery. Writing does not mean simply to allow an unstemmed rush of thoughts to flow onto the paper: writing means rather to construe oneself as the subject of these thoughts! 'I think' means first and foremost: 'I reveal myself as the subject of that which I think.' The thought that flows through me, like a rapid stream that rushes past its banks without being soaked in, moistens and refreshes the always vital foundations of my being. I am a spectator of the phenomena that take place in, moistens and refreshes the always vital foundations of my being. I am a spectator of the phenomena that take place in me. My awakened thought, whether frail or powerful, lucid

or murky, never fully coincides with that which is thought. My thought is a separateness; it pitches the key.

I cannot say exactly when I came to the conviction that literature as a whole depends on this kind of act. I read the philosophers; above all those who had thought more than others about the significance of the cogito. Nearly all of modern philosophy, from Montaigne to Husserl, seemed to me to begin with a reflection which had its roots in the function of consciousness.... Each literary text, whether essay, novel, or poem, had a point of departure; each organized language grew out of an original moment of awareness, adjusted itself then according to the successive points it subsequently touched upon. In this realm there was no basic difference between literary and philosophical texts. All literature was philosophy for me, each philosophy was literature. No matter what sort of text I read, at the instant I began to sense the effect of a concept in it, I found

the same origin in almost each line and the same course running from this source.

How could I have failed to recognize the significance of this discovery! The work always began with an act of awareness, and the critical interest which selected the work as an object of consideration posited the same beginning. I was no longer of the opinion that the writer subjects himself to the unordered flow of his spiritual life. He seemed to me now to be characterized therein that he attacked his problem each moment anew, as if he were beginning again from zero. And, in turn, the literary critic also began at zero, with the complete denial of his 'self'.

Thus it could validly be said that if the writer creates initially his own cogito, the critic finds his point of departure in the cogito of another. This alien cogito would then, regardless of its origin, become a part of the innermost being of the one who reproduced it. It was a kind

of borrowed awareness. In addition, the critic would find it possible with this procedure to draw a number of conclusions from this point of departure. The <u>cogito</u> would reveal itself not only as a primary experience but also, in an involved form, as a principle of multiple developments which arranged themselves within a time line. The critic would only have to follow this line. It would point him on his course. Everything would follow in an intelligible and logical manner from the first 'I think, I am'.

This discovery was of the greatest importance for me: criticism is the mimetic duplication of a conceptual a conceptual action. It does not depend on an arbitrary notion. To experience anew in one's own mind the <u>cogito</u> of a writer or a philosopher means to rediscover the manner of thinking and feeling, means to see how this thinking and feeling originate and assume form and what obstacle they encounter. It means also to rediscover the purpose of a life

which takes shape out of the experience of the individual consciousness.

And that means, also, the simultaneous recognition of the order in which thoughts succeed one another. They appear one after the other, at times in harmony with each other, at times not, depending upon the fluctuation of a reflection at time s not, depending upon the fluctuations of a reflection which seems to evolve anarchically but which, in reality, obeys the play of dialectic powers which belong to the original <u>cogito</u>. The spiritual world thus ordered by the writer must become, in turn, the spiritual order of the critic... The coherence of the literary text becomes the coherence of the critical text which appropriates and transposes the literary text...

I decided to compile systematically all the variations of the <u>cogito</u> Which I could find in my authors. This decision afforded that which up to this point had threatened to

remain chaotic- a form. I had almost drowned in the flood of human thoughts. No matter what manner of thoughts they were or in which spiritual place I had been exposed to them, they had appeared to me as a confusion of currents whose differences I could not note. The procedure through which I now ascended to the self-experience of a certain author allowed me to seize the moment in which the originality of a concept realized itself in his mental act, and measure the significance of the framework in which this concept was to develop. To arrive at this awareness of the self, which is afforded to each human being in a certain way at moments, meant to reach a certain kind of original thought which gave me the key to everything which followed. In every case, the act of consciousness was fundamental. With each new conception of himself, he who experienced it confirmed his own permanence. Even more: it would introduce the formal principle on which the entire

sequence depended. Because of this, I was tempted to call the experience of consciousness of the self a 'categorical' act.... Thus the <u>cogito</u> would never be equal to an isolated event. The awareness of self would be simultaneously an awareness of the world. The manner in which it would operate, the specific angle of vision through which it would arrive at a recognition of its object, would express itself in such a manner that it would encompass, either immediately or at the end of a long process, the entire universe. For whoever perceived himself in an original way would perceive simultaneously an original universe...

Everything was thus contingent on the original <u>cogito</u>: a <u>cogito</u> which was consequently taken up again and continually renewed, but which would remain true to its original appearance through all renewals. Whoever discovers the <u>cogito</u> of an author fulfills the task of the critic

more than half way. Critical awareness can start only at that point.

There remained, however, a final problem to solve. The first and most pressing duty of a literary critic was the rediscovery of the <u>cogito</u> of an author. But how was this <u>cogito</u> to be ' rediscovered'?... To consider a <u>cogito</u> as a possible object of research is to misunderstand its essence. It means to make a kind of thing out of a pure subject. The unusal aspect of the experience of consciousness consists precisely therein: that it cannot be regarded externally as a mere supplement of thought. It is, rather, the inner self of the consciousness, the I that confirms itself as I, regardless of the attributes which it happens to have.

Thus a <u>cogito</u> was for me an act which would be experienced only inwardly. It escapes the mind unless the mind has succeeded in identifying itself with the power of perception perceiving itself. And since the specific test of

the critic consisted precisely in comprehending this process of self- cognition in the studied work, the critic could not achieve that comprehension when he did not, in turn, perform the act thus revealed to him. In other words, the critical act required of the critic the same activity as the of self-awareness performed by the examined author. An identical I had to operate within the author and the critic.

To discover the cogito of writers it is necessary, therefore, to go back and reconstruct, within the same condition, and almost the same terms, the cogito which each one of them had experienced....

There could be no criticism without this initial act through which critical thought enters within the thought criticized and temporarily establishes itself there as the cognitive subject.

To conclude. All of the categorical principles mentioned here are linked. They all stand in relation to each other, and they all relate to the same act of consciousness. Together they represent the development of a thought process directed towards its objects, which imbue it with their form and their foundation, based on its relationship with the external world. However, this thinking is born in loneliness, often in the state of fear which isolation determines; it is a simple consideration of the self, a still undifferentiated experience of the awareness of self. Literary criticism must direct itself above all towards this initial I, to this first apperception of self. If, in the process, it follows all the variations of consciousness, of understanding and of the reconstruction of the universe in the studied author, criticism must nonetheless lay stress above all on the first encounter of self with its own being: all criticism is first and foremost a criticism consciousness.

Walter Benjamin

'The Author as Producer'[1]

You will remember how Plato, in his project for a Republic, deals with writers. In the interests of the community, he denies them the right to dwell therein. Plato had a high opinion of the power of literature. But he thought it harmful and superfluous- in a *perfect* community, be it understood. Since Plato, the question of the writer's right to exist has not often been raised with the same emphasis; today, however, it arises once more. Of course it only seldom arises in this form. But all of you are more or less conversant with it in a different form, that of the question of the writer's autonomy: his freedom to write just what he pleases. You are not inclined to grant him this autonomy. You believe that the present social situation forces him to decide in whose service he wishes to place his activity. The bourgeois author of entertainment literature does not

acknowledge this choice. You prove to him that, without admitting it, he is working in the service of certain class interests. A progressive type of writer does acknowledge this choice. His decision is made upon the basis of the class struggle: he places himself on the side of the proletariat. And that's the end of his autonomy. He directs his activity towards what will be useful to the proletariat in the class struggle. This is usually called pursuing a tendency, or 'commitment' ......

... I hope to be able to show you that the concept of commitment, in the perfunctory form in which it generally occurs in the debate I have just mentioned, is a totally inadequate instrument of political literary criticism. I should like to demonstrate to you that the tendency of a work of literature can be politically correct only if it is also correct in the literary sense. That means that the tendency which is politically correct includes a literary tendency. And let me

add at once: This literary tendency, which is implicity or explicity included in every correct political tendency, this and nothing else makes up the quality of a work. It is because of this that the correct political tendency of a work extends also to its literary quality: because a political tendency which is correct comprises a literary tendency which is correct...

... Social relations, as we know, are determined by production relations. And when materialist criticism approached a work, it used to ask what was the position of that vis-à-vis the social production relations of its times. This is an important question. But also a very difficult one... Before I ask: what is a work's position vis-à-vis the production relations of its time, I should like to ask: what is its position within them? This question concerns the function of a work within the literary production relations of

its time. In other words, it is directly concerned with literary Technique.

By mentioning technique I have named the concept which makes literary products accessible to immediate social, and therefore materialist, analysis. At the same time, the concept of technique represents the dialectical starting-point from which the sterile dichotomy of form and content can be surmounted.

... If, then, we were entitled earlier on to say that the correct political tendency of a work includes its literary quality because it includes its literary tendency, we can now affirm more precisely that this literary tendency may consist in a progressive development of literary technique, or in a regressive one...

... And so we come back to the thesis we proposed at the beginning: the place of the intellectual in the class

struggle can only be determined, or better still chosen, on the basis of his position within the production process...

Here I should like to confine myself to pointing out the decisive difference between merely supplying a production apparatus and changing it. I should like to preface my remarks on the New Objectivity[2] with the proposition that to supply a production apparatus without trying, within the limits of the possible, to change it, is a highly disputable activity even when the material supplied appears to be of a revolutionary nature. For we are confronted with the fact - of which there has been no shortage of proof in Germany over the last decade- that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication is capable of assimilating, indeed of propagating, an astonishing amount of revolutionary themes without ever seriously putting into question its own continued existence or that of the class which owns it. In any case this remains true so long as it is

supplied by hacks, albeit revolutionary hacks. And I define a hack as a man who refuses as a matter of principle to improve the production apparatus and so prise it away from the ruling class for the benefit of Socialism. I further maintain that an appreciable part of so-called left-wing literature had no other social function than that of continually extracting new effects or sensations from this situation for the public's entertainment. Which brings me to the New Objectivity. It launched the fashion for reportage. Let us ask ourselves whose interests were advanced by this technique.

For greater clarity let me concentrate on photographic reportage. Whatever applies to it is transferable to the litery form. Both owe their extraordinary development to publication techniques- radio and the illustrated press. Let us think back to Dadaism. The revolutionary strength of Dadaism lay in testing art for its authenticity. You made

still-lifes out of tickets, spools of cotton, cigarette stubs, and mixed them with pictorial elements. You put a form round the whole thing. And in this way you said to the public : look, your picture frame destroys time; the smallest authentic fragment of everyday life says more than painting...But now let us follow the subsequent development of photography. What do we see? It has become more and more subtle, more and more modern, and the result is that it is now incapable of photographing a tenement or a rubbish-heap without transfiguring it. Not to mention a river dam or an electric cable: in front of these, photography can now only say, 'Haw beautiful'..It has succeeded in turning abject poverty itself, by handling it in a modish, technically perfect way, into an object of enjoyment. For if it is an economic function of photography to supply the masses, by modish processing, with matter which previously eluded mass consumption- Spring, famous

people, foreign countries- then one of its political functions is to renovate the world as it is from the inside, i.e. by modish techniques.

Here we have an example of what it means to supply a production apparatus without changing it. Changing it would have meant bringing down one of the barriers, surmounting one of the contradictions which inhibit the productive capacity of the intelligentsia. What we must demand from the photographer is the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravages of modishnes and confer upon it a revolutionary use value...

... Turning to the New Objectivity as a literary movement, I must go a step further and say that it has turned the struggle against misery into an object of consumption. In many cases, inteed, its political significance has been limited to converting revolutionary reflexes, in so far as these occurred within the bourgeoisie,

into themes of entertainment and amusement which can be fitted without much difficulty into the cabaret life of a large city. The characteristic feature of this literature is the way it transforms political struggle so that it ceases to be a compelling motive for decision and becomes an object of comfortable contemplation; it ceases to be a means of production and becomes an article of consumption....

...Commitment is a necessary, but never a sufficient, condition for a writer's work acquiring an organizing function. For this to happen it is also necessary for the writer to have a teacher's attitude. And today this is more than ever an essential demand. A writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody. The crucial point, therefore, is that a writer's production must have the character of a model: it must be able to instruct other writers in their production and, secondly, it must be able to place an improved apparatus at their disposal. This apparatus will be

the better, the more consumers it brings in contact with the production process- in short, the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators. We already possess a model of this kind, of which, however, I cannot speak here in any detail .. It is Brecht's epic theater.

... Epic theater does not reproduce conditions; rather, it discloses, it uncovers them. This uncovering of the conditions is effected by interrupting the dramatic processes; but such interruption does not act as a stimulant; it has an organizing function. It brings the action to a standstill in mid- course and thereby compels the spectator to take up a position towards the action, and the actor to take up a position towards his part. Let me give an example to show how Brecht, in his selection and treatment of gestures, simply uses the montage - which is so essential to radio and film- in such a way that it ceases to be a modish technique and becomes a human event. Picture to yourself a

family row: the wife is just about to pick up a bronze statuette and hurl it at the daughter; the father is opening a window to call for help. At this moment a stranger enters. The process is interrupted; what becomes apparent in its place is the condition now exposed before the stranger's view: disturbed faces, open window, a devastated interior. There exists, however, a viewpoint from which even the more normal scenes of present-day life do not look so very different from this. That is the viewpoint of the epic dramatist.

He opposes the dramatic laboratory to the finished work of art. He goes back, in a new way, to the theatre's greatest and most ancient opportunity: the opportunity to expose the present...

You may have noticed that the reflections whose conclusions we are now nearing make only one demand on the writer: the demand to think, to reflect upon his position

in the production process. We can be sure that such thinking, in the writers who matter- that is to say the best technicians in their particular branches of the trade-will sooner or later lead them to confirm very soberly their solidarity with the proletariat.

NOTES

❶ Address delivered at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, paris, on 27 April 1934

❷ (Ed.) Die neue neue Sachlichkeit: A post-expressionist artistic movement of the mid-1920s in Germany that included such figures as George Grosz.

Fredric Jameson

'On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act'

This book will argue the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts. It conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today - the psychoanalytic or the myth-critical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural- but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.

This is evidently a much more extreme position than the modest claim, surely acceptable to everyone, that certain texts have social and historical-sometimes even political-resonance. Traditional literary history has, of course, never prohibited the investigation of such topics as the Florentine political background in Dante, Milton's relationship to the schismatics, or Irish historical allusions in Joyce. I would

argue, however, that such information- even where it is not recontained, as it is in most instaces, by an idealistic conception of the history of ideas- does not yield interpretation as such, but rather at best its (indispensable) preconditions.

Today this properly antiquarian relationship to the cultural past has a dialectical counterpart which is ulimately no more satisfactory; I mean the tendency of much contemporary theory to rewrite selected texts from the past in terms of its own aesthetic and, in particular, in terms of a modernist (or more properly post- modernist) conception of language...

This unacceptable option, or ideological double bind, between antiquarianism and modernizing 'relevance' or projection demonstrates that the old dilemmas of historicism- and in paricular, the question of the claims of monuments from distant and even archaic moments of the

cultural past on a culturally different present - do not go away just because we choose to ignore them. Our presupposition, in the analyses that follow, will be that only a genuine philosophy of history is capable of respecting the specificity and radical difference of the social and cultural past while disclosing the solidarity of its polemics and passions, its forms, structures, experiences, and struggles, with those of the present day...

My position here is that only Marxism offers a philosophically coherent and ideologically compelling resolution to the dilemma of historicism evoked above. Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential mystery of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long- forgotten message in surroundings utterly alien to it. This mystery can be reenacted only if the human adventure

is one; only thus- and not through the hobbies of antiquarianism or the projections of the modernists - can we glimpse the vital claims upon us of such long- dead issues as the seasonal alternation of the economy of a primitive tribe, the passionate disputes about the nature of the Trinity, the conflicting models of the polis of the universal Empire, or apparently closer to us in time, the dusty parliamentary and journalistic polemics of the nineteenth-century nation states. These matters can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic a form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme- for Marxism, the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity; only if they are grasped as vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles: freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian,

lord and serf, guild- master and journeyman - in a word, oppressor and oppressed- stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes'[1]. It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity.

From this perspective the convenient working distinction between cultural texts that are social and political and those that are not becomes something worse than an error: namely, a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life... To imagine that, sheltered from the omnipresence of history and the implacable influence of the social, there already

exists a realm of freedom- whether it be that of the microscopic experience of words in a text or the ecstasies and intensities of the various private religions- is only to strengthen the grip of Necessity over all such blind zones in which the individual subject seeks refuge, in pursuit of a purely individual, a merely psychological, project of salvation. The only effective liberation from such constraint begins with the recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical- indeed, that everything is 'in the last analysis' political.

The assertion of a political unconscious proposes that we undertake just such a final analysis and explore the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts. It projects a rival hermeneutic to those already enumerated; but it does so, as we shall see, not so much by repudiating their finding as by arguing its ultimate philosophical and methodological

priority over more specialized interpretive codes whose insights are strategically limited as much by their own situational origins as by the narrow or local ways in which they construe or construct their objects of study.

Still, to describe the readings and analyses contained in the present work as so many interpretations, to present them as so many exhibits in the construction of a new hermeneutic, is already to announce a whole polemic program, which must necessarily come to terms with a critical and theoretical climate variously hostile to these slogans. It is, for instance, increasingly clear that hermeneutic or interpretive activity has become one of the basic polemic targets of contemporary post-structuralism in France, which- powerfully buttressed by the authority of Nietzche-has tended to identify such operations with historicism, and in particular with the dialectic and its valorization of absence and the negative, its assertion of the

necessity and priority of totalizing thought. I will agree with this identification, with this description of the ideological affinities and implications of the ideal of the interpretive or hermeneutic act; but I will argue that the critique is misplaced....

... Leaving aside for the moment the possibility of any genuinely immanent criticism, that a criticism which asks the question 'What does it mean? constitutes something like an allegorical operation in which a text is systematically rewritten in terms of some fundamental master code or 'ultimately determining instance'. On this view, then, all 'interpretation' in the narrower sense demands the forcible or imperceptible transformation of a give text into an allegory of its particular master code or 'transcendental signified': the discredit into which interpretation has fallen is thus at one with the disrepute visited on allegory itself.

Yet to see interpretation this way is to acquire the instruments by which we can force a given interpretive practice to stand and yield up its name, to blurt out its master code and thereby reveal its metaphysical and ideological underpinnings. It should not, in the present intellectual atmosphere, be necessary laboriously to argue the position that every form of practice, including the literary-critical kind, implies and presupposes a form of theory; that empiricism, the mirage of an utterly nontheoretical practice, is a contradiction in terms; that even the most formalizing kinds of literary or textual analysis carry a theoretical charge whose denial unmasks it as ideological....I will here go much further than this, and argue that even the most innocently formalizing readings of the New Criticism have as their essential and ultimate function the propagation of this particular view of what history is. Indeed, no working model of the functioning of

language, the nature of communication or of the speech act, and the dynamics of formal and stylistic change is conceivable which does not imply a whole philosophy of history....

Interpretation proper - what we have called 'strong' rewriting, in distinction from the weak rewriting of ethical codes, which all in one way or another project various notions of the unity and the coherence of consciousness-always presupposes, if not a conception of the unconscious itself, then at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one, or to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code. This is perhaps the place to answer the objection of the ordinary reader, when confronted with elaborate and ingenious interpretations, that the text means just what it says.

Unfortunately, no society has ever been quite so mystified in quite so many ways as our own, saturated as it is with message and information, the very vehicles of mystification (language, as Talleyrand put it, having been given us in order to conceal our thoughts). If everything were transparent, then no ideolory would be possible, and no domination either: evidently that is not our case. But above and beyond the sheer fact of mystification, we must point to the supplementary problem involved in the study of cultural or literary texts, or in other words, essentially, of narratives: for even if discursive language were to be taken literally, there is always, and constitutively, a problem about the 'meaning' of narrative as such; and problem about the assessment and subsequent formulation of the 'meaning' of this or that narrative is the hermeneutic question, which leaves us as deeply involved in our present inquiry as we were when the objection was raised...

....The type of interpretation here proposed is more satisfactorily grasped as the rewriting of the literary text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting or restucturation of a prior historical or ideological subtext, it being always understood that the 'subtext' is not immediately present as such, not some common sense external reality, nor even the conventional narrative of history manuals, but rather must itself always be (re) constructed after the fact. The literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active relationship with the Real: yet in order to do so, it cannot simply allow 'reality' to persevere intertly in its own being, outside the text and at distance. It must rather draw the Real into its own texture, and the ultimate paradoxes and false problems of linguistics, and most notably of semantics, are to be traced back to this process, whereby language manages to carry the Real within itself as its own intrinsic or immanent

subtext. Insofar, in other words, as symbolic action- what Burke will map as 'dream', 'prayer', or 'chat'[2]-is a way of doing something to the world, to that degree what we are calling 'world' must inhere within it, as content it has to take up into itself in order to submit it to the transformation of form. The symbolic act therefore begins by generating and producing its own context in the same moment of emergence in which it steps back from it, taking its measure with a view toward its own project of transformation. The whole paradox of what we have here called the subtext may be summed up in this, that the literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction. It articulates its own situation and textualizes it, thereby encouraging and perpetuating the illusion that the situation itself did not exist before it, that there is nothing but a text, that there never

was any extra- or con-textual reality before the text itself generated it in the form of a mirage. One does not have to argue the reality of history: necessity, like Dr Johnson's stone, does that for us. That history- Althusser's 'absent cause', Lacan's 'Real' - is not a text, for it is fundamentally non- narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual from, or in other words, that it can be approached only be way of prior (re) textualization. Thus, to insist on either of the two inseparable Yet incommensurable dimensions of the symbolic act without the other: to overemphasize the active way in which the text reorganizes its subtext (in order, presumably, to reach the triumphant conclusion that the 'referent' does not exist); or on the other hand to stress the imaginary status of the symbolic act so completely as to reify its social ground, new no longer understood as a subtext but merely as some

inert given that the text passively or fantasmatically 'reflects'- to overstress either of these functions of the symbolic act at the symbolic act at the expense of the other is surely to produce sheer ideology, whether it be, as in the first alternative, the ideology of structuralism, or, in the second, that of vulgar materialism...

History is therefore the experience of Necessity, and it is this alone which can forestall its thematization or reification as a mere object of representation or as one master code among many others.

Necessity is not in that sense a type of content, but rather the inexorable form of events; it is therefore a narrative category in the enlarged sense of some properly narrative political unconscious which has been argued here, a retextualization of History which does not propose the latter as some new representation or 'vision', some new content, but as the formal effect of what Althusser,

following Spinoza, calls an 'absent cause'. Conceived in this sense, History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its 'ruses' turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their own intention. But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some eifid force. This is indeed the ultimate the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them.

NOTES

❶ Kary Marx and friedrich Engels, 'The communist Manifesto', in Karl Marx,On Revolution trans.S.k. Padover (New York, 1971), p.81.

❷ Kenneth, Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (Berkeley, Calif, 1971), pp.5-6.

Terry Eagleton

' Towards a Science of the Text"

The literary text is not the 'expression' of ideology, nor is ideology the 'expression' of social class. The text, rather, is a certain production of ideology, for which the analogy of a dramatic production is in some ways appropriate. A dramatic production does not 'express', 'reflect', or 'reproduce' the dramatic text on which it is based; it 'produces 'the text, transforming it into a unique and irreducible entity... The relation between text and production is a relation of labor: the theatrical instruments (staging, acting skills and so on) transform the 'raw materials, of the text into a specific product, which cannot be mechanically extrapolated from an inspection of the text itself....

The parallel I am pursuing, then, may be schematised as follows:

history/ ideology → dramatic text → dramatic production

history → ideology → literary text

The literary text, that is to say, produces ideology (itself a production) in a way analogous to the operations of dramatic production on dramatic text. And just as the dramatic production's relation to its text reveals the text's internal relations to its 'world' under the form of its own constitution of them, so the literary text's relation to ideology so constitutes that ideology as to reveal something of its relations to history.

Such a formulation instantly raises several questions, the first of which concerns the relation of the text to 'real' history. In what sense is it correct to maintain that ideology, rather than history, is the object of the text? Or, to the

question slightly differently: In what sense, if any, do elements of the historically 'real' enter the text? Georg Lukaçs, in his studies in Europeam Realism, argues that Balzac's greatness liçs in the fact that the 'inexorable veracity' of his art drives him to transcend his reactionary and perceive the real historical issues at stake. Ideology, here, clearly signifies a 'false consciousness' which blocks true historical perception, a screen interposed between men and their history. As such, it is a simplistic notion: it fails to grasp ideology as an inherently complex formation which, by inserting individuals into history in a variety of ways, allows of multiple kinds and degrees of access to that history. It fails, in fact, to grasp the truth that some ideologies, and levels of ideology, are more false than others...

It is not that the text, in allowing us access to ideology, swathes us in simple illusion. Commodities, money, wage-

relations are certainly' phenomenal forms' of capitalist production, but they are nothing if not 'real' for all that......

History, then, certainly' enters' the text, not least the 'historical' text; but it enters it precisely as ideology, as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences. This is not to say that real history is present in the text but in disguised form, so that the task of the critic is then to wrench the mask from its face. It is rather that history is 'present' in the text in the form of a double-absence. The text takes as its object, not the real, but certain significations by which the real lives itself-.significations which are themselves the product of its partial abolition. Within the text itself, then, ideology becomes a dominant structure, determining the character and disposition of certain 'pseudo- real' constituents. This inversion, as it were, of the real historical process, whereby in the text itself ideology seems to determine the historically real rather than

vice versa, is itself naturally determined in the last instance by history itself. History, one might say, is the ultimate signifier of literature, as it is the ultimate signified. for what else in the end could be the source and object of any signifying practice but the real social formation which provides its material matrix? The problem is not that such a claim is false, but that it leaves everything exactly as it was. For the text presents itself to us less as historical than as a sportive flight from history, a reversal and resistance of history, a momentarily liberated zone in which the exigencies of the real seem to evaporate, an enclave of freedom enclosed within the realm of necessity. We know that such freedom is largely illusory - that the text is governed; but it is not illusory merely in the sense of being a false perception of our own. The text's illusion of freedom is part of its very nature-an effect of its peculiarly overdetermined relation to historical reality......

History, then, operates upon the text by an ideological determination which within the text itself privileges ideology as a dominant structure determining its own imaginary or 'pseudo' history. This 'pseudo' or 'textual' real is not related to the historical real as an imaginary 'transposition' of it. Rather than 'imaginatively transposing' the real, the literary work is the production of certain produced representations of the real into an imaginary object. If it distantiates history, it is not because it transmutes it to fantasy, shifting from one ontological gear to another, but because the signification it works into fiction are already representations of reality rather than reality itself. The text is a tissue of meanings, perceptions and responses which inhere in the first place in that imaginary production of the real which is ideology. The 'textual real' is related to the historical real, not as imaginary transposition

of it, but as a product of certain signifying practices whose source and referent is, in the last instance, history itself....

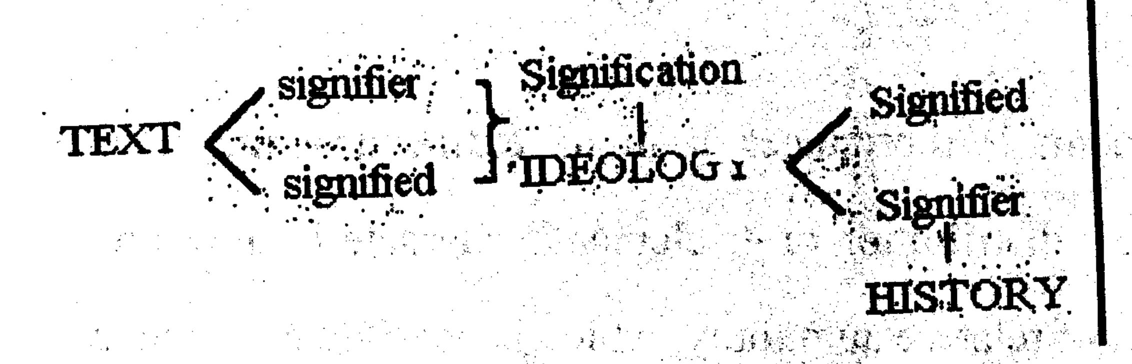
It is true that some texts seem to approach the real more closely than others. The level of the 'textual real' in *Bleak House* is considerably more predominant than it is in, say, Burns's lyric, *My love is like a red, red rose*. The former seeks to illuminate, among other things, a highly localised history; the latter has an extremely abstract referent. Yet whereas it is obvious that Burns's poem refers us to certain modes of ideological signification rather than to a 'real' object, so that whether he had a lover at all is, of course, entirely irrelevant (and is intimated to be so by the poem's very form), the same is true, if not so obviously, of Dickens's novel. It is simply that Dickens deploys particular modes of signification (realism) which entail a greater foregrounding of the 'pseudo- real'; but we should not be led by this to make direct comparisons between the imaginary

London of his novel and the real London. The imaginary London of *Bleak House* exists as the product of a representational process which signifies, not 'Victorian England' as such, but certain of Victorian England's ways of signifying itself.....

..... No text literally 'conforms itself to its content', adequate its signifiers to some signified distinct from them; what is in question is not the relation between the text and some separable signified, but the relation between textual signification (which is both 'form' and 'content') and those more pervasive signification we name ideology. This is not a relation which can be gauged simply by the degree to which the text overtly foregrounds its signification, even though such a practice in particular texts may well produce, and be produced by, a peculiar relation to ideology. For... even the 'prosaic' text produces-although not in its every phrase-that dominance of signifier over signified paraded by

the poem. It reproduces it in its entire structure-in that internal distribution of its elements, characterised by a high degree of relative autonomy, which is possible only because it has no real particular referent.

It remains to resolve a possible ambiguity as to what precisely constitutes the literary work's 'signified'. The signified within the text is what I have termed its 'pseudo-real'-the imaginary situations which the text is 'about'. But this pseudo -real is not to be directly correlated with the historically real; it is, rather, an effect or aspect of the text's whole process of signification. What that whole process signifies is ideology, which is itself a signification of history. The relations in question here can be clarified by a simple diagram :



....Ideology pre-exists the text; but the ideology of the text defines, operates and constitutes that ideology in ways unpremeditated, so to speak, by ideology itself. The particular production of ideology which we may term the 'ideolgy of the text' has no pre-existence; it is identical with the text itself. What is in question here, indeed, is a double relation-not only the objectively determinable relation between text and ideology, but also (and simultaneously) that relation as 'subjectively' flaunted, concealed, intimated or mystified by the text itself......

It is essential, then, to examine in conjuncture two mutually constitutive formations: the nature of the ideology worked by the text and the aesthetic modes of that working.

For a text may operate an ideology which contains elements of the real and simultaneously 'dissolve' those elements, in whole or part, by the manner of its working. Conversely, a notably 'impoverished' ideology may be transmuted by aesthetic forms into something approximating to knowledge....

The guarantor of a **scientific criticism** is the science of ideological formations. It is only on the basis of such a science that such a criticism could possibly be established - only by the assurance of a knowledge of ideology that we can claim a knowledge of literary texts. This is not to say that scientific criticism is merely an 'application' of historical materialism to literature. Criticism is a specific element of the theory of superstructures, which studies the particular laws of its proper object; its task is not to study the laws of ideological formations, but the laws of the production of ideological discourses as literature.....

This complex relation of text to ideology, whereby the text is neither an epiphenomenon of ideology nor a wholly autonomous element, is relevant to the question of the text's 'structure'. The text can be spoken of as having a structure, even if it is a structure constituted not by symmetry but by rupture and decentrement. For this itself, in so far as the distances and conflicts between its diverse elements are determinate rather than opaque, constitutes a structure of a specific kind. Yet this structure is not to be seen as a microcosm or cryptogram of ideology; ideology is not the 'truth' of the text, any more than the dramatic text is the 'truth' of the dramatic performance. The 'truth' of the text is not an essence but a practice - the practice of its relation to ideology, and in terms of that to history. On the basis of this practice, the text constitutes itself as a structure: it destructurs ideology in order to reconstitute it on its own relatively autonomous terms, in order to process and recast

it in aesthetic production, at the same time as it is itself restructured to variable degrees by the effect of ideology upon it. In this destucturing practice, the text encounters ideology as a relatively structured formation which presses upon its own particular valencies and relations, confronts it with a 'concrete logic' which forms the outer perimeter of the text's own self-production. The text works, now with, now against the variable pressure of these valencies, finding itself able to admit one ideological element in relatively unprocessed form but finding therefore the need to displace or recast another, struggling against its recalcitrance and producing, in that struggle, new problems for itself. In this way the text disorders ideology to produce an internal order which may then occasion fresh disorder both in itself and in the ideology. This complex movement can not be imaged as the 'structure of the text' transposing or reproducing the 'structure of the ideology': it can only be grasped as a

ceaseless reciprocal operation of text on ideology and ideology on text, a mutual structuring and restructuring in which the text constantly overdetermines its own determinations. The structure of the text is then the product of this process, not the reflection of its ideological environs. The 'logic of the text' is not a discourse which doubles the 'logic of ideology'; it is, rather, a logic constructed 'athwart' that more encompassing logic.

Northrop Frye

'Archetypal Criticism : Theory of Myths'

In this book we are attempting to outline a few of the grammatical rudiments of literary expression, and the elements of it that correspond to such musical elements as tonality, simple and compound rhythm, canonical imitation, and the like. The aim is to give a rational account of some of the structural principles of Western literature in the context of its Classical and Christian heritage. We are suggesting that the resources of verbal expression are limited, if that is the word, by the literary equivalent of rhythm and key, though that does not mean, any more than it means in music, that its resources are artistically exhaustible. We doubtless have objectors similar to those just imagined for music, saying that our categories are artificial, that they do not do justice to the variety of literature, or that they are not relevant to their own

experiences in reading. However, the question of what the structural principles of literature actually are seems important enough to discuss; and, as literature is an art of words, it should be at least as easy to find words to describe them as to find such words as sonata or figure in music.

In literature, as in painting, the traditional emphasis in both practice and theory has been on representation or 'lifelikeness'. When, for instance, we pick up a novel of Dickens, our immediate impulse, a habit fostered in us by all the criticism we know, is to compare it with 'life', whether as lived by us or by Dickens's contemporaries. Then we meet such characters as Heep or Quilp, and, as neither we nor the Victorians have ever known anything much 'like' these curious monsters, the method promptly breaks down. Some readers will complain that Dickens has relapsed into 'mere' caricature (as though caricature were

easy); others, more sensibly, simply give up the criterion of likeliness and enjoy the creation for its own sake.

The structural principles of painting are frequently described in terms of their analogues in plane geometry (or solid, by a further reach of analogy). A famous letter of Cezanne speaks of the approximation of pictorial form to the sphere and the cube, and the practice of abstract painters seems to confirm his point.... The structural principles of literature, similarly, are to be derived from archetypal and anagogic criticism, the only kinds that assume a larger context of literature as a whole. But we saw in the first essay that, as the modes of fiction move from the mythical to the low mimetic and ironic, they approach a point of extreme 'realism' or representative likeness to life. It follows that the mythical mode, the stories about gods, in which characters have the greatest possible power of action, is the most abstract and conventionalized of all literature modes,

just as the corresponding modes in other arts - religious Byzantine painting, for example - show the highest degree of stylization in their structure. Hence the structural principles of literature are as closely related to mythology and comparative religion as those of painting are to geometry......

We begin our study of archetypes, then, with a world of myth, an abstract or purely literary world of fictional and thematic design, unaffected by canons of plausible adaptation to familiar experience. In terms of narrative, myth is the imitation of actions near or at the conceivable limits of desire. The gods enjoy beautiful women, fight one another with prodigious strength, comfort and assist man, or else watch his miseries from the height of their immortal freedom. The fact that myth operates at the top level of human desire does not mean that it necessarily presents its world as attained or attainable by human beings. In terms of

meaning or *dianoia*, myth is the same world looked at as an area or field of activity, bearing in mind our principle that the meaning or pattern of poetry is a structure of imagery with conceptual implications. The world of mythical imagery is usually represented by the conception of heaven or Paradise in religion, and it is apocalyptic, in the sense of that word already explained, a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body.

Realism, or the art of verisimilitude, evokes the response 'How like that is to what we know!' When what is written is like what is known, we have an art of extended or implied simile. And as realism is an art of implicit simile; myth is an art of implicit metaphorical identity. The word 'sun-god', with a hyphen used instead of a predicate, is a pure ideogram, in Pound's terminology, or literal metaphor, in ours. In myth we see the structural principles of literature

isolated; in realism we see the same structural principles (not similar ones) fitting into a context of plausibility... The presence of a mythical structure in realistic fiction, however, poses certain technical problems for making it plausible, and the devices used in solving these problems may be given the general name of displacement.

Myth, then, is one extreme of literary design; naturalism is the other, and in between lies the whole area of romance, using that term to mean, not the historical mode of the first essay, but the tendency, noted later in the same essay, to displace myth in a human direction and yet, in contrast to 'realism' toconventionalize content in an idealized direction. The central principle of displacement is that what can be metaphorically identified in a myth can only be linked in romance by some form of simile: analogy, significant association, incidental accompanying imagery, and the like. In a myth we can have a sun-god or a tree-god;

in a romance we may have a person who is significantly associated with the sun or trees. In more realistic modes the association becomes less significant and more a matter of incidental, even coincidental or accidental, imagery. In the dragon-killing legend of the St George and Perseus family... a country under an old feeble king is terrorized by a dragon who eventually demands the king's daughter, but is slain by the hero. This seems to be a romantic analogy (perhaps also, in this case, a descendant) of a myth of a waste land restored to life by a fertility god. In the myth, then, the dragon and the old king would be identified. We can in fact concentrate the myth still further into an Oedipus fantasy in which the hero is not the old king's son-in-law but his son, and the rescued damsel the hero's mother. If the story were a private dream such identifications would be made as a matter of course. But to make it a plausible, symmetrical, and morally acceptable story a good deal of displacement is

necessary, and it is only after a comparative study of the story type has been made that the metaphorical structure within it begins to emerge...

This affinity between the mythical and the abstractly literary illuminates many aspects of fiction, especially the more popular fiction which is realistic enough to be plausible in its incidents and yet romantic enough to be a 'good story', which means a clearly designed one. The introduction of an omen or portent, or the device of making a whole story the fulfillment of a prophecy given at the beginning, is an example. Such a device suggests, in its existential projection, a conception of ineluctable fate or hidden omnipotent will. Actually, it is a piece of pure literary design, giving the beginning some symmetrical relationship with the end, and the only ineluctable will involoved is that of the author. Hence, we often find it even in writers not temperamentally much in sympathy with the

portentous. In *Anna Karenina*, for instance, the death of the railway porter in the opening book is accepted by Anna as an omen for herself. Similarly, we find portents and omens in Sophocles, they are there primarily because they fit the structure of his type of dramatic tragedy, and prove nothing about any clear-cut beliefs in fate held by either dramatist or audience.

We have, then, three organizations of myths and archetypal symbols in literature. First, there is undisplaced myth, generally, concerned with gods or demons, and which takes the form of two contrasting worlds of total metaphorical identification, one desirable and the other undesirable. These worlds are often identified with the existential heavens and hells of the religions contemporary with such literature. These two forms of metaphorical organization we call the apocalyptic and the demonic respectively. Second, we have the general tendency we have

called the romantic, the tendency to suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience. Third, we have the tendency of 'realism' (my distaste for this inept term is reflected in the quotation marks) to throw the emphasis on content and representation rather than on the shape of the story. Ironic literature begins with realism and tends toward myth, its mythical patterns being as a rule more suggestive of the demonic than of the apocalyptic, though sometimes it simply continues the romantic tradition of stylization. Hawthorne, Poe, Conard, Hardy and Virginia Woolf all provide examples.

In looking at a picture, we may stand close to it and analyze the details of brush work and palette knife. This corresponds roughly to the rhetorical analysis of the new critics in literature. At a little distance back, the design comes into clearer view, and we study rather the content represented: this is the best distance for realistic Dutch

pictures, for example, where we are in a sense reading the picture. The further back we go, the more conscious we are of the organizing design. At a great distance from, say, a Madonna, we can see nothing but the archetype of the Madonna, a large centripetal blue mass with a contrasting point of interest at its center. In the criticism of literature, too, we often have to 'stand back' from the poem to see its archetypal organization. If we 'stand back' from Spenser's *Mutabilitie Cantoes*, we see a background of ordered circular light and a sinister black mass thrusting up into the lower foreground - much the same archetypal shape that we see in the opening of the Book of Job. If we 'stand back' from a realistic novel such as Tolstoy's *Resurrection* or Zola's *Germinal*, we can see the mythopoeic designs indicated by those titles.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

'Language as Determination of the Hermeneutic Object'

Writing involves self-alienation. Its overcoming, the reading of the text, is thus the highest task of understanding. Even the pure sings of an inscription can be seen properly and articulated correctly only if the text can be transformed back into language. This transformation, however, always establishes... a relationship to what is meant, to the object that is being spoken about. Here the process of understanding moves entirely in the sphere of a meaning mediated by the linguistic tradition. Thus the hermeneutical task with an inscription starts only after it has been deciphered. Only in an extended sense do non-literary monuments present a hermeneutical task, for they cannot be understood of themselves. What they mean is a question of the interpretation, not of the deciphering and understanding of what they say.

In writing, language gains its true intellectual quality, for when confronted with a written tradition understanding consciousness acquires its full sovereignty. Its being does not depend on anything. Thus reading consciousness is in potential possession of its history. It is not for nothing that with the emergence of a literary culture the idea of 'philology', 'love of speech', was transferred entirely to the all-embracing art of reading, losing its original connection with the cultivation of speech and argument. A reading consciousness is necessarily historical and communicates freely with historical tradition. Thus it has some historical justification if, with Hegel, one says that history begins with emergence of a will to hand things down, to make memory last. Writing is not merely chance or extra addition that qualitatively changes nothing in the development of oral tradition. Certainly, there can be a will to make things continue, a will to permanency without writing. But only a

written tradition can detach itself from the mere continuance of fragments left over from the life of the past, remnants from which it is possible to reconstruct life.

From the start, the tradition of inscriptions does not share in the free form of tradition that we call literature, inasmuch as it depends on the existence of the remains, whether of stone or whatever material. But it is true of everything that has come down to us that here a will to permanence has created the unique forms of continuance that we call literature. It presents us not only with a stock of memorials and signs. Literature, rather, has acquired its own simultaneity with every present. To understand it does not mean primarily to reason one's way back into the past, but to have a present involvement in what is said. It is not really about a relationship between persons, between the reader and the author (who is perhaps quite unknown), but about sharing in the communication that the text gives us.

This meaning of what is said is, when we understand it, quite independent of whether we can gain from the tradition a picture of the author and of whether or not the historical interpretation of the tradition as a literary source is our concern.

Let us here recall that the task of hermeneutics was originally and chiefly the understanding of texts. Schleiermarcher was the first to see that the hermeneutical problem was not raised by words alone, but that oral utterance also presented - and perhaps in its fullest form - the problem of understanding. We have outlined above how the psychological dimension that he gave to hermeneutics blocked its historical one. In actual fact, writing is central to the hermeneutical phenomenon, insofar as its detachment both from the writer or author and from a specifically addressed recipient or reader has given it a life of its own. What is fixed in writing has raised itself publicly into a

sphere of meaning in which everyone who can read has an equal share.

Certainly, in relation to language, writing seems a secondary phenomenon. The sign language of writing refers back to the actual language of speech. But that language is capable of being written is by no means identical to its nature. Rather, this capacity of being written down is based on the fact that speech itself shares in the pure ideality of the meaning that communicates itself in it. In writing, this meaning of what is spoken exists purely for itself, completely detached from all emotional elements of expressions and communication. A text is not to be understood as an expression of life, but in what it says. Writing is the abstract ideality of language. Hence the meaning of something written is fundamentally identifiable and reproducible. What is identical in the reproduction is only that which was formulated. This indicates that

'reproduction' cannot be meant here in its strict sense. It does not mean referring back to some original source in which something is said or written. The understanding of something written is not a reproduction of something that is past, but the sharing of a present meaning.

Writing has the methodological advantage that it presents the hermeneutical problem in all its purity, detached from everything psychological. What is, however, in our eyes and for our purposes a methodological advantage is at the same time the expression of a specific weakness that is characteristic of writing even more than of language. The task of understanding is seen with particular clarity when we recognise this weakness of all writing. We need only to think again of what Plato said, namely that the specific weakness of writing was that no one could come to the aid of the written word if it falls victim to misunderstanding, intentional or uninteional....

All writing is, as we have said. a kind of alienated speech, and its signs need to be transformed back into speech and meaning. Because the meaning has undergone a kind of self-alienation through being written down, this transformation back is the real hermeneneutical task. The meaning of what has been said is to be stated anew, simply on the basis of the words passed on by means of the written signs. In contrast to the spoken word there is no other aid in the interpretation of the written word. Thus the important thing here is, in a special sense, the 'art' of writing. The spoken word interprets itself to an astonishing degree, by the way of speaking, the tone of voice, the tempo etc, but also by the circumstances in which it is spoken...

All writing claims that it can be awakened into spoken language, and this claim to autonomy of meaning goes so for that even an authentic reading, e.g. the reading of a poem by the poet, becomes questionable if the direction of

our listening takes us away from what our understanding should really be concerned with.... What is stated in the text must be detached from all contingent factors and grasped in its full ideality, in which alone it has validity. Thus, precisely because it entirely detaches the sense of what is said from the person saying it, the written word makes the reader, in his understanding of it, the arbiter of its claim to truth. The reader experiences in all its validity what is addressed to him and what he understands is always more than an alien meaning: it is always possible truth. This is what emerges from the detachment of what is spoken from the speaker and from the permanence that writing bestows. This is the deeper hermeneutical reason for the fact.... that it does not occur to people who are not used to reading that what is written down could be wrong, since anything written seems to them like a document that is self-authenticating.

Everything written is, in fact, in a special way the object of hermeneutics. what we found in the extreme case of a foreign language and the problems of translation is confirmed here by the autonomy of reading: understanding is not a psychic transposition. The horizon of understanding cannot be limited either by what the writer had originally in mind, or by the horizon of the person to whom the text was originally addressed.

It sounds at first like a sensible hermeneutic rule, generally recognised as such, that nothing should be put into a text that the writer or the reader could not have intended. But this rule can be applied only in extreme cases. For texts do not be understood as a living expression of the subjectivity of their writers. This, then, cannot define the limits of a text's meaning. However, it is not only the limiting of the meaning of a text to the 'actual' thoughts of the author that is questionable. Even if we seek to determine

the meaning of a text objectively by seeing it as a contemporary document and in relation to its original reader, as was Schleiermacher's basic procedure, such limitation is a very chancy affair. The idea of the contemporary addressee can claim only a restricted critical validity. For what is contemporaneity? Listeners of the day before yesterday as well as of the day after tomorrow are always among those to whom one speaks as a contemporary. Where are we to draw the line that excludes a reader from being addressed? What are contemporaries and what is a text's claim to truth in the face of this multifarious mixture of past and future? The idea of the original reader is full of unexamined idealisaion.

Furthermore, our concept of the nature of literary tradition contains a fundamental objection to the hermeneutic legitimisation of the idea of the original reader. We saw that literature is defined by the will to hand on. But

a person who copies and passes on is doing it for his own contemporaries. Thus the reference to the original reader, like that to the meaning of the author. seems to offer only a very crude historico- hermeneutical criterion which cannot really limit the horizon of a text's meaning. What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. Normative concepts such as the author's meaning or the original reader's understanding represent in fact only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding.

Jacques Derrida

'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences'

Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an 'event', if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural- or structuralist- thought to reduce or to suspect. But let me use the term ' event' anyway, employing it with caution and as if in quotation marks. In this sense, this event will have the exterior form of a rupture and a redoubling.

It would be easy enough to show that the concept of structure and even the word' structure' itself are as old as the episteme- that is to say, as old as western science and western philosophy - and that their roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language, into whose deepest recesses the

episteme plunges to gather them together once more, making them part of itself in a metaphorical displacement. Nevertheless, up until the event which I wish to mark out and define, structure-or rather the structurality of structure-although it has always been involved, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence,, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure-one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure-but a bove all to make sure that the organizing principles of the structure would limit what we might call the freeplay of the structure. No doubt that by orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the freeplay of its elements inside the total from. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.

Nevertheless, the center also closes off the freeplay it opens up and makes possible. Qua center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. At least this permutation has always remained interdicted (I use this word deliberately). Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constitutes that very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure-although it

represents coherence itself, the condition of the episteme as philosophy or science-is contradictorily coherent. And, as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a freeplay based on a fundamental ground, a freeplay which is constituted upon a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is itself beyond the reach of the freeplay. With this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were from the very beginning at stake in the game...

The event I called a rupture, the disruption I alluded to at the beginning of this paper, would presumably have come about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought, that is to say, repeated, and this is why I said that this disruption was repetition in all of the senses of this

word. From then on it became necessary to think the law which governed, as it were, the desire for the center in the constitution of structure and the process of signification prescribing its displacements and its substitutions for this law of the central presence-but a central presence which was never itself, which has always already been transported outside itself in its surrogate. The surrogate does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow pre-existed it. from then on it was probably necessary to think that there was no center, that the center had no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign- substitutions came into play. This moment was that in which language invaded the universal problematic; that in which, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse - provided we can agree on this word - that is to say, when everything became a system where the central signified, the

original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum.

Where and how does this decentering, this notion of the strucurality of structure, occur? It would be somewhat naive to refer to an event, a doctrine, or an author in order to designate this occurrence. It is no doubt part of the totality of an era, our own, but still it has already begun to proclaim itself and begun to work. Nevertheless, if I wished to give some sort of indication by choosing one or two 'names', and by recalling those authors in whose discourses this occurrence has most nearly maintained its most radical formulation, I would probably cite the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without truth present); the

Freudian critique or self- presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self- identity and of self-proximity or self-possession; and, more radically, the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of ontotheology, of the determination of being as presence. But all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a sort of circel. This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relationship between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics. There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. we have no language - no syntax and no lexicon-which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. To pick out one example from many: the metaphysics of presence is attacked with the help of the concept of the sign. But from the moment

anyone wishes this to show, as I suggested a moment ago, that there is no transcendental or privileged signified and that the domain or the interplay of signification has, henceforth, no limit, he ought to extend his refusal to the concept and to the word sign itself - which is precisely what cannot be done. For the signification 'sign' has always been comprehended and determined, in its sense, as sign-of, signifier referring to a signified, signifier different from its signified. If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word signifier itself which ought to be abandoned as a metaphysical concept... but we cannot do without the concept of the sign, we cannot give up this metaphysical complicity without also giving up the critique we are directing against this complicity, without the risk of erasing difference (altogether) in the self-identity of a signified reducing into itself its signifier, or, what amounts to the same thing, simply expelling it outside itself. For

there are two heterogeneous ways of erasing the difference between the signifier and the signified: one, the classic way, consists in reducing or deriving the signifier, that is to say, ultimately in submitting the sign to thought; the other, the one we are using here against the first one, consists in putting into question the system in which the preceding reduction functioned: first and foremost, the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The paradox is that the metaphysical reduction of the sign needed the opposition it was reducing. The opposition is part of the system, along with the reduction. And what I am saying here about the sign can be extended to all the concepts and all the sentences of metaphysics, in particular to the discourse on 'structure'. But there are many more ways of being caught in this circle. They are more or less naive, more or less empirical, more or less empirical, more or less systematic, more or less close to the formulation or every

to the normalization of this circle. It is these differences which explain the multiplicity of destructive discourses and the disagreement between those who make them...

... Freeplay is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Freeplay is always an interplay of absence and presence, but if it is to be radically conceived, freeplay must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence; being must be conceived of as presence or absence beginning whit the possibility of freeplay and not the other way around. If Le'vi-Strauss, better than any other, has brought to light the freeplay of repetition and the repetition of freeplay, one no less perceives in his work a sort of ethic of presence, an ethic of nostalgia for origins. an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence and self-presence in

speech-an ethic, nostalgia, and even remorse which he often presents as the motivation of the ethnological project when he move towards archaic societies - exemplary societies in his eyes. These texts are well known.

As a turning toward the presence, lost or impossible, of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediateness is thus the sad, negative, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauist facet of the thinking of freeplay of which the Nietzschean affirmation-the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation-would be the other side. This affirmation then determines the non-center otherwise than as loss of the center. And it plays the game without security. For there is a sure freeplay: that which is limited to the substitution of given and existing, presentpieces. In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to genetic indetermination, to the seminal adventure of the trace.

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of interpretation. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology-in other words, through the history of all of his history-has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game. The reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game. The second interpretation of interpretation, to which Nietzsche showed us the way, does not seek in ethnography, as L'evi-Strauss wished, the 'inspiration of a new humanism' (again from the ' Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss')

There are more than enough indications today to suggest we might perceive that these two interpretations of interpretation-which are absolutely irreconcilable even if we live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an obscure economy-together share the field which we call, in such a problematic fashion, the human sciences..

For my part, although these two interpretations must acknowledge and accentuate their difference and define their irreducibility, I do not believe that today there is any question of choosing- in the first place because here we are in a region (let's say, provisionally, a region of historicity) where the category of choice seems particularly trivial; and in the second, because we must try to conceive of the common ground. and the *différance* of this irreducible difference .3

Here there is a sort of question, call it historical, of which we are only glimpsing today the conception, the

formulation, the gestations, the labor. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the business of childbearing - but also with a glance toward those who, in a company from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away in the face of the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non- species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.

NOTES

❶ The word 'jeu' is variously translated here as 'play', 'interplay', 'game', and 'stake', besides the normative translation 'freeplay'. All footnotes to this article are additions by the translator (Richard Macksey).

❷ Interdite: 'forbidden', 'disconcerted', 'speechless'.

❸ From différer, in the sense of 'to postpone', 'put off', 'defer'.

Elsewhere Derrida uses the word as a synonym for the German Aufschub: 'Postponement', and relates it to the central Freudian concepts of Verspatung, Nachtraglichkeied. and to the 'detours to death' of Beyond the pleasure principle by sigmund Freud (standard Edition, ed. James starchy. vol. XIXX,London, 1961), Chap. v.

Roland Barthes

'The Death of the Author'

In his Story <u>**Sarrasine**</u> Balzac, describing a castrato disguised as a woman, writes the following sentence: 'This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her istinctive worries, fussings, and her delicious sensibility' Who is speaking thus? her impetuous boldness, Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrate hidden beneath the woman ? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative

where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.

No doubt it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. The sense of this phenomenon, however, has varied; in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance'-the mastery of the narrative code-may possibly be admired but never his 'genius'. The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of,

as is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author...

Though the sway of the Author remains powerful (the new criticism[2] has often done no more than consolidate it), it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it. In France, Mallarme was the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to doubstitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confussed with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not me'. Mallarme's entire poetics consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to

restore the place of the reader).... Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I:language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.

The removal of the Author (one could talk here with Brecht of a veritable 'distancing', the Author diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage) is not merely an historical fact or an act of writing; it utterly transforms the modern text (or-which is the same thing-the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent). The temporality is different. The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*. The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that

he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being proceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now. The fact is (or, it follows) that writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy, call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which it is uttered - something like the I declare of kings or the I sing of very ancient poets. Having buried the Author, the modern

scriptor can thus no longer believe, as according to the pthetic view of his predecessors, that this hand is too slow for his thought or passion and that consequently, making a lw of necessity, he must emphasize this delay and indefinitely 'polish' his form. For him, on the contrary, the hand, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin - or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'mesage' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writing, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. Similar to Bouvard and Pécuchet,[3] those eternal copyists, at once sublime and

comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on anyone of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely ... Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred.

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to

impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified,to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well. the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases : society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' - victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) it today undermined along with the Author. In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meanin ceaselessly to evaporate it, carring out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it

would be better from now to say writing), by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an antitheological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases - reason, science, law.

Let us come back to the Balzac sentence. No one, no 'person', says it: its source, its voice, is not the true place of the writing, which is reading ... The reader is the space in which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destintion cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. Which is why it is derisory to condemm the new writing in the name of a humanism hypocritically

turned hampion of the reader's rights. Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer isthe only person in literature. We are now begining to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.

Stanely Fish

'Interpreting the Variorum'

What I am suggesting is that formal units are always a function of the interpretive model one brings to bear; they are not 'in' the text, and I would make the same argument for intentions. That is, intention is no more embodied 'in' the text than are formal units; rather an intention, like a formal unit, is made when perceptual or interpretive closure is hazarded; it is verified by an interpretive act, and I would add, it is not verifiable in any other way. This last assertion is too large to be fully considered here, but I can sketch out the argumentative sequence I would follow were I to consider it: intention is known when and only when it is recognized; it is recognized as soon as you decide about it; you decide about it as soon as you make a sense; and you make a sense (or so my model claims) as soon as you can....

It seems then that the price one pays for denying the priority of either forms or intentions is an inability to say how it is that one ever begins. Yet we do begin, and we continue, and because we do there arises an immediate counter-objection to the preceding page. If interpretive acts are the source of forms rather than the other way around, why isn't it the case that readers are always performing the same acts or a random succession [sic] of forms? How, in short, does one explain these two random succession of forms? How, in short, does one explain these two 'facts' of reading? : ❶ the same reader will perform differently when reading two 'different' (the word is in quotation marks because its status is precisely what is at issue) texts; and❷ different readers will perform similarly when reading the 'same' (in quotes for the same reason) text. That is to say, both the stability of interpretation among readers and the variety of interpretation in the career of a single reader

would seem to agree for the existence of something independent of and prior to interpretive acts, something which produces them. I will answer this challenge by asserting that both the stability and the variety are functions of interpretive strategies rather than of texts.

Let us suppose that I am reading Lycidas. What is it that I am doing? First of all, what I am not doing is 'simply reading', an activity in which I do not believe because it implies the possibility of pure (that is, disinterested) perception. Rather, I am proceeding on the basis of (at least) two interpretive decisions: ❶ that Lycidas is a pastoral and ❷ that it was written by Milton. (I should add that the notions 'pastoral' and 'Milton' are also interpretations; that is they do not stand for a set of indisputable, objective facts; if they did, a great many books would not now be getting written). Once these decisions have been made (and if I had not made these I would have made others, and they would

be consequential in the same way), I am immediately predisposed to perform certain acts, to 'find' by looking for, themes (the relationship between natural processes and the careers of men, the efficacy of poetry or of any other action), to confer significance (on flowers, streams, shepherds, pagan deities), to mark out 'formal units' (the lament, the consolation, the turn, the affirmation of faith, etc.). My disposition to perform these acts (and others; the list is not meant to be exhaustive) constitutes a set of interpretive strategies, which, when they are put into execution, become the large act of reading. That is to say, interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading (the pure act of perception in which I do not believe); they are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them. Several important things follow from this account:

➊ I did not have to execute this particular set of interpretive strategies because I did not have to make those particular interpretive (pre-reading) decisions. I could have decided, for example, that Lycidas was a text in which a set of fantasies and defenses find expression. These decisions would have entailed the assumption of another set of interpretive strategies (perhaps like that put forward by Norman Holland in *The Dynamics of Literary Response*) and the execution of that set would have made another text.

➋ I could execute this same set of strategies when presented with texts that did not bear the title (again a notion which is itself an interpretation) Lycidas, A Pastoral Monday... I could decide (it is a decision some have made) that *Adam Bede* is a pastoral written by an author who consciously modeled herself on Milton (still remembering that 'pastoral' and 'Milton' are

interpretations, not facts in the public domain); or I could decide, as Empson did, that a great many things not usually considered pastoral were in fact to be so read; and either decision would give rise to a set of interpretive strategies, which, when put into action, would write the text I write when reading Lycidas. (Are you with me?).

❸ A reader other than myself who, when presented with Lycidas, proceeds to put into execution a set of interpretive strategies similar to mine (how he could do so in a question I will take up later), will perform the same (or at least a similar) succession of interpretive acts. He and I then might be tempted to say that we agree about the poem (thereby assuming that the poem exists independently of the acts either of us performs); but what we really would agree about is the way to write it.

❹ A reader other than myself who, when presented with Lycidas (please keep in mind that the status of Lycidas is what is at issue), puts into execution a different set of interpretive strategies will perform a different succession of interpretive acts. (I am assuming, it is the article of my faith, that a reader will always execute some set of interpretive strategies and therefore perform some succession of interpretive acts.) One of us might then be tempted to complain to the other that we could not possibly be reading the same poem (literary criticism is full of such complaints) and he would be right; for each of us would be reading the poem he had made.

The large conclusion that follows from these four smaller ones is that the notions of the 'same' or 'different' texts are fictions. If I read *Lycidas* and *The Waste Land* differently (in fact I do not), it will not be because the formal structures of the two poems (to term them such is

also an interpretive decision) call forth different interpretive strategies but because my predisposition to execute different interpretive strategies will produce different formal structures. That is, the two poems are different because I have decided that they will be. The proof of this is the possibility of doing the reverse (that is why point 2 is so important). That is to say, the answer to the question 'why do different texts give rise to different sequences of interpretive acts?' is that they don't have to, an answer which implies strongly that 'they' don't exist. Indeed it has always been possible to put into action interpretive strategies designed to make all texts one, or to put it more accurately, to be forever making the same text. Augustine urges just such a strategy, for example, in *On Christian Doctrine* where he delivers the 'rule of faith' which is of course a rule of interpretation. It is dazzlingly simple: everything in the Scriptures, and indeed in the world when

it is properly read, points to (bears the meaning of) God's love for us and our answering responsibility to love our fellow cretures for His sake. If only you should come upon something which does not at first seem to bear this meaning, that 'does not literally pertain to virtuous behavior or to the truth of faith', you are then to make it 'to be figurative' and proceed to scrutinize it 'until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced'... Whatever one may think of this interpretive program, its success and ease of execution are attested to be centuries of Christian exegesis. It is my contention that any interpretive program, any set of interpretive strategies, can have a similar success, although few have been as spectacularly successful as this one....

The other challenging question - 'why will different readers execute the same interpretive strategy when faced with the "same" text?' - can be handled in the same way.

The answer is again that they don't have to, and my evidence is the entire history of literary criticism. And again this answer implies that the notion 'same text' is the product of the possession by two or more readers of similar interpretive strategies.

But why should this ever happen? Why should two or more readers ever agree, and why should regular, that is, habitual, differences in the career of a single reader ever occur? What is the explanation on the one hand of the stability of interpretation (at least among certain groups at certain times) and on the other of the orderly variety of interpretation if it is not the stability and variety of texts? The answer to all of these questions is to be found in a notion that has been implicit in my argument, the notion of interpretive communities. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for

constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. If it is an article of faith in a particular community that there are a variety of texts, its members will boast a repertoire of strategies of remaking them. And if a community believes in the existence of only one text, then the single strategy its members employ will be forever writing it. The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in turn will call their accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the 'true text', but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being. This, then, is the explanation both for the stability of interpretation among different readers (they belong to the

same community) and for the regularity with which a single reader will employ different interpretive strategies and thus make different texts (he belongs to different communities). It also explains why there are disagreements and why they can be debated in a principled way: not because of a stability in texts, but because of stability in the makeup of interpretive communities and therefore in the opposing positions they make possible. Of course this stability is always temporary (unlike the longed for and timeless stability of the text). Interpretive communities grow larger and decline, and individuals move from one to another; thus while the alignments are not permanent, they are always there, providing just enough stability for the interpretive battles to go on, and just enough shift and slippage to assure that they will never be settled. The notion of interpretive communities thus stands between an impossible ideal and the fear which leads so many to maintain it. The ideal is of

perfect agreement and it would require texts to have a status independent of interpretation. The fear is of interpretive anarchy, but it would only be realized if interpretation (text making) were completely random. It is the fragile but real consolidation of interpretive communities that allows us to talk to one another, but with no hope or fear of ever being able to stop.

In other words interpretive communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned. This does not mean that there is a point at which an individual has not yet learned any. The ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human. What is acquired are the ways of interpreting and those same ways can also be forgotten or supplanted, or complicated or dropped from favor ('no one reads that way any more'). When any of these things happens, there is a corresponding change in texts, not

because they are being read differently, but because they are being written differently.

The only stability, then, inheres in the fact (at least in my model) that interpretive strategies are always being deployed, and this means that communication is a much more chancy affair than we are accustomed to think it. For if there are no fixed texts, but only interpretive strategies making them; and if interpretive strategies are not natural but learned (and are therefore unavailable to a finite description), what is it that utterers (speakers, authors, critics, me, you) do? In the old model utterers are in the business of handing over ready made or prefabricated meanings. These meanings are said to be encoded, and the code is assumed to be in the world independently of the individuals who are obliged to attach themselves to it (if they do not they run the danger of being declared deviant). In my model, however, meanings are not extracted but

made and made not by encoded forms but by interpretive strategies that call forms into being. It follows then that what utterers do is give hearers and readers the opportunity to make meanings (and texts) by inviting them to put into execution a set of strategies. It is presumed that the invitation will be recognized, and that presumption rests on a projection on the part of a speaker or author of the moves he would make if confronted by the sounds or marks he is uttering or setting down.

It would seem at first that this account of things simply reintroduces the old objection; for isn't this an admission that there is after all a formal encoding, not perhaps of meanings, but of the directions for making them, for executing interpretive strategies? The answer is that they will only by directions to those who already have the interpretive strategies in the first place. Rather than producing interpretive acts, they are the product of one. An

author hazards his projection, not because of something 'in' the marks, but because of something he assumes to be in his reader. The very existence of the 'marks' is a function of an interpretive community, for they will be recognized (that is, made) only by its members. Those outside that community will be deploying a different set of interpretive strategies (interpretation cannot be withheld) and will therefore be making different marks.

So once again I have made the text disappear, but unfortunately the problems do not disappear with it. If everyone is continually executing interpretive strategies and in that act constituting texts, intentions, speakers, and authors, how can anyone of us know whether or not he is a member of the same interpretive community as any other of us? The answer is that he can't, since any evidence brought foreword to support the claim would itself be an interpretation (especially if the 'other' were an author long

dead). The only 'proof' of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: 'we know'. I say it to you now, knowing full well that you will agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me.

Josephine Donovan

'Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism'

While feminist criticism has diversified considerably in the past few years, I wish in this article to return to the 'images of women' approach that dominated feminist literary studies in the early 1970s and is still central to the pedagogy of Women's Studies in literature. Through the 'images of women' approach the critic determines how women characters are presented in literature. Usually the critic discovers that the images are Other, and therefore that the literature is alien. The task may be labeled 'negative criticism' if one wishes to adapt the dialectical terms of the Frankfurt school of Marxist criticism. It is 'negative' because the critic is in effect saying 'no' to reified perceptions, structures, and models that have historically denied full humanity to women. This means looking

'negatively' at much of Western literature. Here I wish to set down a theoretical moral basis for this critique.

Feminist criticism is rooted in the fundamental a priori intuition that women are seats of consciousness: are selves, not others... Women in literature written by men are for the most part seen as Other, as objects, of interest only insofar as they serve or detract from the goals of the male protagonist. Such literature is alien from a female point of view because it denies her essential selfhood....

The primary assumption a critic in the 'images of women' school must make is an evaluation of the authenticity of the female characters. Authenticity is another concept borrowed from the Existentialists, in particular Heidegger, who meant by it whether an individual has a self-defined critical consciousness. as opposed to a mass-produced or stereotypical identity. Sartre defined the latter as the en-soi, the in-itself, or the object-self, as

opposed to the authentic pour-soi or for-itself, which is the critical or reflective consciousness capable of forming projects.

The concept of authenticity in feminist criticism is therefore not a free-floating, 'impressionistic' notion, as has been suggested. Judgments which evaluate a character's authenticity are rooted in the extensive body of Existentialist theory on the subject. Such judgments are made according to whether the character has a reflective, critical consciousness, where s/he is a moral agent, capable of self-determined action, whether, in short, s/he is a Self, not an Other. Such judgments enable the feminist critic to determine the degree to which sexist ideology controls the text. Sexist ideology necessarily promotes the concept of woman-as- object or woman-as-other....

Some films of Ingmar Bergman provide excellent if subtle examples of the phenomenon of aesthetic

exploitation of women characters. *Cries and Whispers* (1972) is a film which one might, on first viewing, hail as a sensitive portrayal of the lives of four women. The extraordinary visual beauty of the film is seductive enough to promote this judgment. However, on reflection one comes to realize that the women are used aesthetically as if they were on the same level of moral importance as the red decor of their surroundings....

I am using aesthetic here in the sense given it at least since Kant, that of a disinterested appreciation of a phenomenon that exists as a discrete entity in space and time, which is pleasing within these or because of these spatio-temporal coordinates. As we shall see, I believe that the imputed divorce between aesthetics and morals which this view entails is specious, masking as it does ideological exploitation of female figures.... Consequently an artist like Bergman can treat his female figures as objects within a

spatio-temporal continuum that are of use only insofar as they fit into the total aesthetic vision he has fashioned....

The aesthetic dimension of literature and of film cannot be divorced from the moral dimension, as we have facily come to assume under the influence of technique-oriented critical methodologies (New Criticism, for example). Since Aristotle, the aesthetic experience has in fact been understood as one which provides release, relief, catharsis, and the pleasure of wholeness. The events within this aesthetic frame may be horrible or violent but they are ultimately redeemed by the fact that they take their place within an order. This order cannot be a superficial order, i.e., it is not sufficient to simply frame a scene of grotesque suffering. It has to be placed within a moral order of great consequence. All the 'great works' of Western literature intend and depend upon a moral order. The events of the work take their place within an order that satisfies one's

sense of justice or one's sense of irony, which itself requires a belief in an order beyond the events of the work.

when one identifies too closely with a character's suffering in a work of art, or when that suffering is exploited to the point where it breaks the boundaries of appropriateness within the moral context of the work, the aesthetic continuity is dislocated: the suffering cannot be justified, morally or aesthetically....

Much of our literature in fact depends upon a series of fixed images of women, stereotypes. These reified forms, surprisingly few in number, are repeated over and over again through much of Western literature. The objectified images have one thing in common, however; they define the woman insofar as she relates to, serves, or thwarts the interests of men.

In the Western tradition these stereotypes tend to fall into two categories, reflecting the endemic Manicheistic dualism in the Western world-view. Female stereotypes symbolize either the spiritual or the material, good or evil. Mary, the mother of Jesus, came through time to exemplify the ultimate in spiritual goodness, and Eve, the partner of Adam, the most sinister of evil physicality.

The following diagram shows how this dualism is conceived:

spiritual	material
spirit/soul	body
virginal ideal	sex object
Mary	Eve
inspiration	seductress
good	evil

Under the category of the good-woman stereotypes, that is, those who serve the interests of the hero, are the patient wife, the mother/ martyr,, and the lady. In the bad or evil category are deviants who reject or do not properly serve man or his interests: the old maid/career woman, the witch/lesbian, the shrew or domineering mother/wife. Several works, considered archetypal masterpieces of the Western tradition, rely upon these simplistic stereotypes of woman...

These works, central to the Western tradition - the *Odyssey*, the *Commedia*, and *Faust* - do not present the 'inside' of woman's experience. We learn little, if anything, of the women's own personal responses to events. They are simply vehicles for the growth and salvation of the male protagonist. The women are Other in Beauvoir's sense of the term, and therefore this literature must remain alien to the female reader who reads as a woman.

One can argue, of course that a woman reader can suspend her femaleness and appreciate works which have male protagonists (and objectified women) when the protagonists are wrestling with universal human problems. In other words, one can argue that one can transcend one's sex in appreciating a literary work. To some extent I believe that this is indeed possible...

The real question is not whether a woman can identify with the subjective consciousness or the self if it is male, but whether she should, given her own political and social environment. In other words, isn't it morally misleading to encourage a person who is barred from action to identify with an individual whose dilemma (in the case of Hamlet) is simply whether to act? Action, taking charge, is a choice that historically has been denied women and still is unavailable to them in many areas. Until, however, ideological socialization ceases, we as female readers

cannot authentically transcend our sex. Such literature as treated in this article must remain alien. This does not mean that we should throw out or refuse to read these works, but that they should be read with perspective that recognizes the sexism inherent in their moral vision...

Feminist criticism is moral because it sees that one of the central problems of Western literature is that in much of it women are not human beings, seats of consciousness. They are objects, who are used to facilitate, explain away, or redeem the projects of men.

Western projects of redemption almost always depend upon a salvific woman. On the other hand, in some Western literature women are the objects, the scapegoats, of much cruelty and evil.

Much Western thought and literature has failed to come to grips with the problem of evil because it facilely projects

evil upon woman or other hypostasized 'Others', such as the Jew, the Negro. thereby denying the reality of the contingent order.

Feminist criticism becomes political when it asserts that literature, academic curricula, and the standards of critical judgment should be changed, so that literature will not longer function as propaganda furthering sexist ideology. The feminist critic recognizes that literature is an important contributing element to a moral atmosphere in which women are derogated...

Linguistic analysis and semiological studies can tell us much about how cultural ideologies are expressed in literary form. But only when style is studied in the context of the author's or the culture's moral view of woman can it be of feminist significance. Unfortunately much formalist analysis in the past has relied on the convenient divorce between values and aesthetics described above. For this

reason it has been able to evade the central evaluative issue that criticism must face: that of the moral stature of the work.

WOLFGANG ISER

'INDETERMINACy and the Reader's Response'

If texts actually possessed only the meaning brought to light by interpretation, then there would remain very little else for the reader. He could only accept or reject it, take it or leave it. The fundamental question is, however, what actually does take place between text and reader? Is it possible to look into the relationship at all, or is not the critic simply plunging into a private world where he can only make vague conjectures and speculations? Is one able to express anything at all about those highly heterogeneous reactions that run between text and reader? At the same time it must be pointed out that a text can only come to life when it is read, and if it is to be examined, it must therefore be studied through the eyes of the reader...

If it were really true-as the author of a certain well-known essay on 'the Art of Interpretation' would have us believe- that the meaning is concealed within a text itself, one cannot help wondering why texts should indulge in such a 'hide-and-seek' with their interpreters; and even more puzzling, once it has been found, should then change again, even though the letters, words, and sentences of the text remain the same...

Shouldn't the interpreter in fact renounce his sanctified role of conveying meanings, if he wants to open up the possibilities of a text? His description of the text is, after all, nothing more than an experience of a cultured reader - in other words, it is only one of the possible realizations of a text......

... How can we describe the relationship between text and reader?....The first step is to indicate the special qualities of a literary text that distinguish it from other

kinds of text. The second step will be to name and analyze the basic elements of the cause of the response to literary works. Here we shall pay special attention to different degrees of what I should like to call indeterminacy in a text and the various ways in which it is brought about...

Let us come to our first step. How can we describe the status of a literary text? The first point is that it differs from any other text that presents an object which exists independent of the text. If a piece of writing describes an object that exists with equal determinacy outside it, then the text is simply an exposition of the object. In Austin's terms, it is a 'constative uterance,'as opposed to a 'performative utterance,' which actually creates its object.. It goes without saying that literary texts belong to the second category. There is no concrete object corresponding to them in the real world, although of course they constitute their objects out of elements to be found in the real world...

... If a litery text presents no real objects, it nevertheless establishes its reality by the reader's participation and by the reader's response. The reader, however, cannot refer to any definite object or independent facts in order to judge whether the text has presented its subject rightly or wrongly. This possibility of verification that all expository texts offer is, precisely, denied by the literary text. At this point there arises a certain amount of indeterminacy which is peculiar to all literary texts, for they permit no referral to any identical real- life situation...

... The gaps of indeterminacy can be filled in by referring the text to real, verifiable factors, in such a way that it appears to be nothing more than a mirror-reflection of these factors. In this case it loses its literary quality in the reflection. Alternatively, the indeterminacy of a text may be so resistant to counterbalancing that any identification with the real world is impossible. Then the world of the text

establishes itself as being in competition with the familiar world, a competition which must inevitably have some repercussions on the familiar one. In this case, the text may tend to function as a criticism of lift.

Indeterminacy can also be counterbalanced at any given time in terms of the individual experience of the reader. He can reduce a text to the level of his own experiences, provided that he projects his own standards onto the text in order to grasp its specific meaning. This, too, is a counterbalancing of indeterminacy which disappears when the subjective norms of the reader guide him through the text. On the other hand, a text may conceivably contradict our own preconceptions to such a degree that it calls forth drastic reactions, such as throwing a book away or, at the other extreme, being compelled to revise those preconceptions. This also constitutes a way of removing indeterminacy which always permits the

possibility of connecting one's own experience with what the text wants to convey. Whenever this happens, indeterminacy tends to disappear, because communication has occurred.

Such basic reactions clarify the status of the literary text: Its main characteristic is its peculiar halfway position between the world of real objects and the reader's own world of experience. The act of reading is therefore a process of seeking to pin down the oscillating structure of the text to some specific meaning .

So for, we have only described the literary text, as it were, from the outside. We must now, in a second step, mention certain important formal conditions which give rise to indeterminacy in the text itself. At once, we are confronted with the question as to what really is the substance of such a text, for it has no counterpart in the world of empirical objects. The answer is that literary

objects come into being through the unfolding of a variety of views which constitute the 'object' in stages and at the same time give a concrete form for the reader to contemplate. We shall call such views ' schematized views', following a term coined by the Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden, because every one of them sets out to present the object not in an incidental or even accidental way, but in a representative manner. How many of these views are necessary to give a clear idea of the literary object? Obviously, a large number, if one is to get a precise conception.

This raises a highly relevant problem: each single view will generally reveal only one representative aspect. It therefore determines the literary object, and at the same time it raises the need for a new determination. This means that a literary object never reaches the end of its many-faceted determinacy....

If we assume that the 'schematized views' form a basic characteristic of the literary text, nothing has thus far been said as to how they link up with one another. While they touch upon one another, the degree of connections is usually not stated, but has to be inferred.... In other words,, between the 'schematized views' there is a no-man's-land of indeterminacy, which results precisely from the determinacy of the sequence of each individual view. Gaps are bound to open up, and offer a free play of interpretation for the specific way in which the various views can be connected with one another. These gaps give the reader a chance to build his own bridges, relating the different aspects of the object which have thus far been revealed to him. It is quite impossible for the text itself to fill in the gaps. In fact, the more a text tries to be precise (i.e., the more 'schematized views' it offers), the greater will be the number of gaps between the views. Classic examples of this

are the last novels of Joyce, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, where the overprecision of the presentation gives rise to a proportionate increase in indeterminacy....

The indeterminate sections or gaps of literary texts are in no way to be regarded as a defect; on the contrary, they are a basic element for the aesthetic response. Generally, the reader will not even be aware of such gaps - at least so for as novels up to the end of the nineteenth century are concerned. Nevertheless, they are not without influence on his reading, for the 'schematized views' are continually connected with each other in the reading process. This means that the reader fills in the remaining gaps. He removes them by a free play of meaning-projection and thus by himself repairs the unformulated connections between the particular views. This is borne out by the fact that a second reading of a piece of literature often produces a different impression from the first...

In this way, every literary text invites some form of participation on the part of the reader. A text which lays things out before the reder in such a way that he can either accept or reject them will lessen the degree of participation as it allows him nothing but a yes or no. Texts with such minimal indeterminacy tend to be tedious, for it is only when the reader is given the chance to participate actively that he will regard the text, whose intention he himself has helped to compose, as real. For we generally tend to regard things that we have made ourselves as being real. And so it can be said that indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation...

... Let us therefore, by way of concluding, examine the consequences of the facts we have outlined. First of all, we can say that the indeterminate elements of literary prose - perhaps even of all literature - represent the most important link between text and reader. It is the switch that activates

the reader in using his own ideas in order to fulfill the intention of the text. This means that it is the basis of a textural structure in which the reader's part is already incorporated....

In this respect, literary texts differ from those which formulate a concrete meaning or truth. Texts of the latter kind are, by their very nature, independent of the individual reader, for the meaning or truth which they express exists independently of any reader's participation. But when the most vital element of a textual structure is the process of reading, it is forced to rely on the individual reader for the realization of a possible meaning or truth. The meaning is conditioned by the text itself, but only in a form that allows the reader himself to bring it out.

...While the literary text has its reality not in the world of objects but in the imagination of its reader, it wins a certain precedence over texts which want to make a

statement concerning meaning or truth; in short, over those which claim or have an apophantic character. Meanings and truths are, by nature, influenced by their historical position and cannot in principle be set apart from history. The same applies to literature, too, but since the reality of a literary text lies within the reader's imagination, it must, again by nature,, have a far greater chance of transcending its historical position. From this arises the suspicion that literary texts are resistant to the course of time, not because they represent eternal values that are supposedly independent of time, but because their structure continually allows the reader to place himself within the world of fiction....

... And precisely because the literary text makes no objectively real demand on its readers, it opens, up a freedom that every one can interpret in his own way. Thus, with every text we learn not only about what we are reading

but also about ourselves, and this process is all the more effective if what we are supposed to experience is not explicitly stated but has to be inferred.... It is largely because of this fact that literary texts are so constructed as to confirm none of the meanings we ascribe to them, although by means of their structure they continually lead us to such projections of meaning. Thus it is perhaps one of the chief values of literature that by its very indeterminacy it is able to transcend the restrictions of time and written word and to give to people of all ages and backgrounds the chance to enter other worlds and so enrich their own lives.

NOTES

❶ J. L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words, ed. J. O. Urmson (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp.1 ff.

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